

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**A** while back, a British newspaper, The Times, interviewed a prominent member of the Jewish community - let's call him Lord X - on his 92nd birthday. The interviewer said, "Most people, when they reach their 92nd birthday, start thinking about slowing down. You seem to be speeding up. Why is that?"

Lord X's reply was this: "When you get to 92, you start seeing the door begin to close, and I have so much to do before the door closes that the older I get, the harder I have to work."

Something like that is the impression we get of Abraham in this week's parsha. Sarah, his constant companion throughout their journeys, has died. He is 137 years old. We see him mourn Sarah's death, and then he moves into action.

He engages in an elaborate negotiation to buy a plot of land in which to bury her. As the narrative makes clear, this is not a simple task. He confesses to the local people, Hittites, that he is "an immigrant and a resident among you," meaning that he knows he has no right to buy land. It will take a special concession on their part for him to do so. The Hittites politely but firmly try to discourage him. He has no need to buy a burial plot. "No one among us will deny you his burial site to bury your dead." He can bury Sarah in someone else's graveyard. Equally politely but no less insistently, Abraham makes it clear that he is determined to buy land. In the event, he pays a highly inflated price (400 silver shekels) to do so.

The purchase of the cave of Machpelah is evidently a highly significant event, because it is recorded in great detail and highly legal terminology, not just here, but three times subsequently in Genesis, each time with the same formality. Here for instance is Jacob on his deathbed, speaking to his sons: "Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre

in Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite. There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah. The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites." (Gen. 49: 29-32)

Something significant is being hinted at here, otherwise why mention, each time, exactly where the field is and who Abraham bought it from?

Immediately after the story of land purchase, we read, "Abraham was old, well advanced in years, and G-d had blessed Abraham with everything." Again this sounds like the end of a life, not a preface to a new course of action, and again our expectation is confounded. Abraham launches into a new initiative, this time to find a suitable wife for his son Isaac, who by now is at least 37 years old. Abraham leaves nothing to chance. He does not speak to Isaac himself but to his most trusted servant, whom he instructs to go "to my native land, to my birthplace," and find the appropriate woman. He wants Isaac to have a wife who will share his faith and way of life. Abraham does not specify that she should come from his own family, but this seems to be an assumption hovering in the background.

As with the purchase of the field, so here, the course of events is described in more detail than almost anywhere else in the Torah. Every conversational exchange is recorded. The contrast with the story of the binding of Isaac could not be greater. There, almost everything - Abraham's thoughts, Isaac's feelings - is left unsaid. Here, everything is said. Again, the literary style calls our attention to the significance of what is happening, without telling us precisely what it is.

The explanation is simple and unexpected. Throughout the story of Abraham and Sarah, G-d had promised them two things: children and a land. The promise of the land ("Rise, walk in the land throughout its length and breadth, for I will give it to you") is repeated no less than seven times. The promise of children occurs four times. Abraham's descendants will be "a great nation," as many as "the dust of the earth," and "the stars in the sky"; he will be the father not of one nation but of many.

Despite this, when Sarah dies, Abraham has not a single inch of the land that he can call his own, and has only one child who will continue the covenant, Isaac, currently unmarried. Neither promise has been fulfilled. Hence the extraordinary detail of the two main stories in Chayei Sarah: the purchase of land and the

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in memory of our beloved mother  
Chana Rosenberg A"H  
on her second yartzeit  
חנה בת יוסף ע"ה  
נפטרה כ"ג מר חשוון תשע"ב  
by Itzy and Ruchie Weisberg

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finding of a wife for Isaac. There is a moral here, and the Torah slows down the speed of the narrative, so that we will not miss the point.

G-d promises, but we have to act. G-d promised Abraham the land, but he had to buy the first field. G-d promised Abraham many descendants, but Abraham had to ensure that his son was married, and to a woman who would share the life of the covenant, so that Abraham would have, as we say today, "Jewish grandchildren."

Despite all the promises, G-d does not and will not do it alone. By the very act of self-limitation (tzimtzum) through which He creates the space for human freedom, He gives us responsibility, and only by exercising it do we reach our full stature as human beings. G-d saved Noah from the flood, but Noah had to make the ark. He gave the land of Israel to the people of Israel, but they had to fight the battles. G-d gives us the strength to act, but we have to do the deed. What changes the world, what fulfils our destiny, is not what G-d does for us but what we do for G-d.

That is what leaders understand, and it is what made Abraham the first Jewish leader. Leaders take responsibility for creating the conditions through which G-d's purposes can be fulfilled. They are not passive but active - even in old age, like Abraham in this week's parsha. Indeed in the next chapter, to our surprise, we read that after Sarah's death, Abraham takes another wife and has eight more children. Whatever else this tells us, and there are many interpretations (the most likely is that it explains how Abraham became "the father of many nations"), it certainly conveys the point that Abraham stayed young the way Moses stayed young, "His eye undimmed and his natural energy unabated." Though action takes energy, it gives us energy. The contrast between Noah in old age and Abraham in old age could not be greater.

Perhaps though the most important point is that large promises - a land, countless children - become real through small beginnings. Leaders begin with an envisioned future, but they also know that there is a long journey between here and there and we can only reach it one act at a time, one day at a time. There is no miraculous shortcut, and if there were, it would not help. It would make achievement like Jonah's gourd, that grew overnight, then died overnight. Abraham acquired only a single field, and had just one son who would

continue the covenant. Yet he did not complain, and he died serene and satisfied. Because he had begun. Because he had left future generations something on which to build. All great change is the work of more than one generation, and none of us will live to see the full fruit of our endeavours.

Leaders see the destination, begin the journey, and leave behind them those who will continue it. That is enough to endow a life with immortality. © 2013 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd Abraham said unto his servant, the elder of his house, that ruled over all that he had: 'Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh. You shall go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son, even for Isaac.' (Genesis 24: 2-4)

The portion of Chayei Sarah comprises two chapters of the Book of Genesis: Chapter 23 deals with the death and burial of the matriarch Sarah, and Chapter 24 deals with the selection of a suitable wife for her son, Isaac.

The connection between these two themes is clear: With the loss of his beloved life partner, a bereft Abraham understands the awesome responsibility that lies before him to find a suitable mate for his heir to the covenant, Isaac. For this formidable and momentous task he chooses "his trusted servant, the wise elder of his household, who controlled all that was his," Eliezer (Genesis 24: 2).

Eliezer demonstrates great skill in understanding what is required for the wife of Isaac. He understands that she must be a member of the Abrahamic family (Rebekah is indeed the granddaughter of Abraham's brother, Nahor), and must not dwell among the evil and accursed Canaanites. He further understands that the young woman must be willing to live with Isaac in Abraham's domain rather than removing Isaac to the home of her family; Rebekah must come under the influence of Abraham. Most of all, he understands Isaac's bride must have the character of Abrahamic hospitality, to the extent that she will not only draw water from the well for him, the messenger, but will also draw water for his camels. And of course he must arrange for the young woman to make the journey to Isaac and live her life in the Land of Israel and under the tent of Abraham.

Eliezer arranges a match that will determine the destiny of G-d's covenantal nation with wisdom, tact and sensitivity.

The Bible states that Eliezer set out for his mission "with all the bounty [goodness] of his master in his hand." (Ibid 24: 10) Rashi takes this to mean that Abraham gave Eliezer a blank check; he would pay any price for the right wife for Isaac. Rabbi Moshe Besdin gives the verse a very different thrust: All the bounty

and goodness that had been expressed by Abraham was now placed in the hands of his most trusted servant because the future of Abraham was dependent upon Isaac, his heir apparent, and the future of Isaac depended on his future wife.

Strangely, throughout this lengthy biblical tale, Eliezer's name is not mentioned.

He is referred to as "eved" (the servant) 10 times and as "ish" (the personage) seven times, but never once by his name.

Wouldn't such an important individual, entrusted with such a significant mission, deserve to have his name in lights for everyone to see and remember? I believe that is exactly the point of the biblical record. Eliezer the individual has been completely overwhelmed by the immensity of this task: He is the servant of Abraham, committed to performing an act that will determine the continuity of the Abrahamic vision. A midrash even suggests that Eliezer had a daughter of marriageable age, whom he had expected to wed to Isaac, allowing his grandchildren to inherit the Abrahamic dream and wealth. But Eliezer forgets any of his personal ambitions or goals; he is the consummate servant of Abraham, using all of his wisdom and ingenuity to carry out his master's will. (see Rashi on verse 24: 39 quoting Bereishit Rabbah 59: 9).

In this he is like Moses, who utilizes all of his spiritual and intellectual prowess in the service of his Master, the Lord, G-d of Universe.

Just as Moses was both an eved and an ish at the same time (See Deut. 33:1 and 34:5) – with his individual personality dedicated to G-d's will – so Eliezer was an ish and an eved simultaneously.

Zev Wolfson immigrated to the United States as a refugee from a Siberian prison camp, having carried his dead father on his back until he found a place to bury him.

He took responsibility for his beloved mother and brother in the strange new world of America and he was one of the most brilliant people I ever met. He mastered both the stock market and real estate and navigated halls of influence and power. All of these gifts were channeled into creating learning institutions for Torah and strengthening the State of Israel.

He was a crucial figure in decisions by Congress to reduce Israel's loan obligations and send the Patriot missile batteries to the State of Israel just before the Gulf War.

He would relentlessly pursue new people and new ideas, especially striving to identify rabbis and educators who would create new avenues in kiruv (outreach) and bring assimilating Jews back into the fold.

Whenever I was with him, I knew in advance that there would be no time for breakfast, lunch or dinner; we rarely had a chance to drink water. His energy and his drive gave him no rest when it came to doing G-d's work. He was probably the greatest builder

of Torah institutions in the history of the world. Despite this, not one building, classroom or project bears his name. He was a servant of the Lord and a man of G-d who lived selflessly and modestly for the sake of his mission.

He was truly Eliezer. © 2013 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## **Wein Online**

In truth, our mother Sarah, like many other mothers past and present in Jewish life, has not quite received her due. Rashi, quoting Midrash in describing Sarah's life, states that all the years of Sarah's life were "for good." He must mean "for good" in a spiritual and holy sense, for in her physical worldly life there was little good that she experienced. Wandering over the Middle East by following her visionary husband to a strange and unknown destination; being forced into Pharaoh's harem; being unable to conceive children; having her maidservant Hagar marry Avraham and attempt to usurp her position in the household; kidnapped by Avimelech, the king of the Philistines; seeing her precious son's life threatened by an aggressive and violent step-brother, Yishmael; and passing away almost fifty years before her husband – this does not make for a happy resume of a life that was "all good." In fact, it raises the eternal question of why do bad things happen to good people.

But powerless as we are to really answer that question cogently and logically, we should, in retrospect, view our mother Sarah with a renewed sense of awe and appreciation. Lesser people would have been crushed by such a cascade of events in one's lifetime. The Mishna speaks of the ten tests in life that befell Avraham - and that he rose above all of them. We should also make mention of the tests in life that our mother Sarah endured in her existence and that she too rose above them.

"The wisdom of women builds their home," said King Solomon. That certainly must be said of the house of Avraham, the founding home of the Jewish people. It was Sarah's wisdom and fortitude that was the foundation of that home.

In everyone's life there are moments of danger, frustration, disappointment and even tragedy. Who amongst us can say in truth that all the years of our life were "all good?" This being the case we must revert to the understanding that since the "all good" in the life of our mother Sarah must perforce be interpreted in a spiritual sense – in a sense of continual service to G-d and man and a commitment to a higher level of living than mere physical existence and an optimistic frame of mind – so too must we search for such an "all good" interpretation in our individual lives as well.

The striving for finding such an "all good" approach to life is the essence of Torah and Jewish

ritual. I once had to attend a rabbinical court here in Israel in order to register as being married. As often happens in government offices here the wait to be serviced was long and the ambience was not very pleasant. The clerk handling the matter was rather surly and disinterested in my problem.

Finally a wonderful rabbi came out of his inner office and took care of me and my need expeditiously and warmly. When I was foolish enough to begin to complain to him about the long wait and the less than forthcoming clerk, the rabbi gently shushed me and said: "Here in the Land of Israel all is good!" And when one is on that level of spiritually that is certainly true.

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#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**A**s he buys a burial plot for his wife Sarah, Avraham (Abraham) identifies himself as a ger toshav. (Genesis 23:4) The term is enigmatic. Ger means alien while toshav means resident. How could Avraham be both when those terms seem to be the opposite of one another?

On a simple level, Avraham tells the children of Heth that he initially came to their community as a stranger, but now he has finally settled in. Alternatively, the Midrash interprets Avraham declaring: "I am prepared to conduct myself as a stranger and pay for the burial plot. If, however, you rebuff me I will take it as a citizen who already owns the land that G-d had promised to His children."

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik sees it differently. For him, Avraham is defining the status of the Jew throughout history living amongst foreigners. No matter how comfortable a Jew may feel among others, in the end, the Jew is a stranger and is viewed as an other by his neighbors.

Another thought comes to mind. Avraham was a very successful man. He introduced the revolutionary idea of monotheism-and, indeed is chosen to be the father of the Jewish nation. Still, as he buries his wife, he emotionally cries out that as accomplished as he may be, in the end he is vulnerable, with glaring weaknesses and frailties-just like everyone else. Hence, ger toshav resonates one's outlook on life. As much as one may feel like a toshav, like a resident who is in control of life, one, in the same breath is a ger, a stranger-here one day and gone the next.

Commenting on the verse recited every Friday night which speaks of the rivers dancing and the trees clapping hands, Rav Shlomo Carlebach said: "You know beautiful friends, the way we are living. One day I feel so good, the next day I'm in the lowest dumps. One day I'm so happy, the next day I want to commit suicide.

I want you to know nature is very real. When a person says I'm happy, the tree says, 'hey, wait till I see you tomorrow.' One day I say I'm so holy, then the rivers will say wait till tomorrow. You know one day there will be a great Shabbos, a never-ending Shabbos. One day the whole world will be good forever. One day there'll be joy forever. So every Friday night when we receive Shabbos, I'm crying, I'm begging, Master of the world, let it be forever, let it be for real. You know my beautiful friends, so many houses are broken, so many hearts are broken so many windows are broken because nothing lasts forever, nothing lasts forever. But this Shabbos, let it be, let it be, let it be forever let the rivers dance, let the trees clap hands...So we are begging, we are crying before the One, let it be, let this Shabbos be forever, let us hear the great trumpet, ba-hatzotzros bekol shofar. Let us hear the great trumpet, let us hear the greatest message, from now on everything good and holy will be forever."

But until that time, nothing lasts forever. All joy, says the Talmud, must be tempered with trembling. We are all, in the words of Avraham a ger toshav, permanent, yet temporary. Such is the way of the world.

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#### **RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

### **Who's on First?**

**A** number of weeks ago, I wrote about Ishmael. Actually, I wrote about his mother, and the piece was not so kind to her. I received scores of e-mail, some praising the piece, others railing that it was not strong enough, and still others decrying it, saying that it bordered on racism.

Today, once again, I am going to write about Ishmael. But before you gird your loins, let me tell you that I won't speak about the biblical Ishmael, but rather his namesake, Rabbi Ishmael.

You see, one of the great sages of the Talmud was named Rabbi Ishmael. A fact that should shock our genteel readers. In fact, the Talmud is filled with quotes from Rabbi Ishmael. But how did he get such a name? After all, why would anyone name their child after the "wild-ass of a man whose hand is against everyone, and everyone's hand is against him" (Genesis 16:11)? Rabbi Yishmael's opinions are from the most significant in the entire Talmud yet his name is surely not a Rabbinic one? Or perhaps there is more to Ishmael than we truly know.

The answer is somewhat simple. It is base on two words in the Torah. "Yitzchak and Yishmael." Let me put them in context. You see, the Torah tells us "Abraham expired and died at a good old age, mature and content, and he was gathered to his people. His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah. (Genesis 25:8-9)." It seems innocuous

enough. But alas, the Talmud infers something from two words that turn Ishmael, from the castigated wild-man, to one who is worthy of place in Jewish history, a Talmudic giant bearing his name.

The Talmud in Bava Basra tells us, that from the fact that Ishmael, the older son, yielded the precedence to Isaac, the more holy son, we gather that Ishmael repented of his evil ways and, in fact this is what is meant by the "good old age" mentioned in connection with Abraham's passing.

Amazing! An entire life's transformed is embodied in the smallest act of letting a younger brother go first. And Ishmael becomes the hero after whom the great rabbi is named! How is that? Just because he let his younger brother go first? Is that really possible?

Richard Busby (1606-1695), headmaster of the prestigious Westminster School was a strict disciplinarian. It is reputed that in his 58 years as headmaster only one pupil passed through the school without being personally beaten by Busby. With its fine reputation, the school was visited by King Charles II.

As Dr. Busby was showing King Charles II around the school, it was noticed that, contrary to etiquette, the headmaster kept his hat on in the royal presence. One of the king's aides, mention this flagrant violation of protocol to the headmaster.

Bushy demurred. He excused himself in these words: "It would not do for my boys to suppose that there existed a greater man on earth than I."

Think about it. Who was at that funeral? All of Ishmael's grandchildren, each strongly entrenched in the belief that they were the descendants of the truly chosen son.

And now comes Avraham's funeral, an occasion attended by hundreds of his followers and admirers. Protocol would have the true heir walk first. It's the perfect setting to make a statement. It is the setting where you can insist that you are the true heir and tell the world, that now, with the passing of Avraham, "there is no greater man on earth than I."

Yet Ishmael defers. He lets Isaac go first. It is perhaps a greater act than laying down a sword or embracing an enemy. It is breaking an ingrained character trait. And breaking a character trait, breaking the desire for a little bit of respect in the eyes of observers is a true sign of greatness.

Thank you Rabbi Yishmael's mom for letting us know that. Thank you Yishmael for being so brave. Pass the message on. © 2013 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

**RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

## Weekly Dvar

**P**arshat Chaye Sarah records two major transactions, which begs us to wonder about their connection. The Parsha starts with Avraham

insisting on paying for his plot of land in which to bury his wife. After much negotiating, Efron agrees to accept payment for the plot. The Parsha then goes into even greater detail describing the efforts of Avraham's servant in finding a suitable wife for Yitzchak, his son. What's the connection, other than then technically both being "transactions"?

One possibility is that the dialog of the first transaction could be the requisite to the completion of the second. In other words, Avraham had to understand and negotiate a FAIR transaction where both sides benefit before he could find a wife for his son. This requirement says a lot about what it takes to find a suitable mate: Give! If you find yourself taking more than you're giving in a given relationship, you need to insist on adjusting it! If any marriage is to work, the first ingredient is mutual respect, which breeds mutual giving. It is this fact that Avraham mastered before venturing to find his son a wife, and it's this lesson that we should master before venturing to find our own mates or business partners. © 2013 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

**RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

## Haftorah

**T**his week's haftorah teaches us an important lesson about Divine providence. Dovid Hamelech suddenly aged and withdrew from the affairs of his kingdom. This development created a significant void in the parliament and opened the door to minority groups and conspiracy. Adoniyahu, a son of the king seized the opportunity and began grooming himself for the throne. This was in direct opposition to the king's wishes who publicly declared his son Shlomo as his successor. Dovid's choice was rooted in a prophecy received years earlier that he would be granted a son named Shlomo who would be his successor. In fact, Dovid secured this issue from the outset and promised Shlomo's mother, BasSheva, that her son would be the next king. Now, in Dovid's aged state this matter took a mean turn and Adoniyahu secretly and rapidly developed a strong following. The king's closest advisors discovered this plot and corroborated with Shlomo's mother to appeal to the king. After hearing the severity of the situation the king responded and ordered the immediate coronation of Shlomo. Adoniyahu's attempt gave rise to an unprecedented experience and Shlomo succeeded his father during Dovid Hamelech's own lifetime.

These drastic measures reveal serious concern over Shlomo's actual reign. The Sages reflect upon this situation and raise a perplexing question. Further in this chapter Scriptures tell us that Dovid Hamelech's order to anoint Shlomo met great trepidation. B'nayahu, the presiding member of Sanhedrin responded and said, "Let it be Hashem's will that the mission is successful." (M'lochim 1:36) The Sages question the need for a blessing at this point. It suggests that B'nayahu was

uncertain of the mission's worthiness in Hashem's eyes. They question, "Didn't Hashem promise Dovid from the outset that Shlomo would be the next king?" Now that this prophecy was in the midst of fulfillment what could possibly affect it? They answer that although Hashem's original promise was but moments away from fulfillment many impediments would present themselves prior to its actual realization. (Breishis Rabba 76:2)

These words teach us an important lesson about Divine providence. Although Shlomo's reign was pre-ordained and promised to Dovid Hamelech these did not guarantee its reality. The sages explain that prophetic statements of this nature are subject to change. They are given in accordance to the individual's worthiness and depend upon his maintaining standards of piety and perfection. They draw proof to this from our Patriarch Yaakov who was severely frightened by his wicked brother Eisav's pending encounter with him. They explain that although Hashem promised earlier to protect Yaakov he did not feel secure. He was concerned that he may have unintentionally committed some fault and forfeited His protection. Apparently, Dovid Hamelech shared a similar concern that he may have forfeited some of his merits and no longer deserve that Shlomo be his successor. (see Maharzu's comment ad loc)

Ramchal however deduces a second dimension from this Midrash. He sternly warns us against delaying to perform a mitzva and states, "When a mitzva opportunity presents itself one must immediately act upon it. There is no greater danger than this because every moment another impediment may arise and inhibit one from fulfilling the mitzva." He quotes the above Midrash and seems to interpret it in the following light. Although Shlomo's reign was pre-ordained and promised to Dovid Hamelech it remained subject to human action or the lack of thereof. Every act of mitzva is subject to opposition and challenge and must be enacted as soon as possible. The mere fact that one is lax in fulfilling a mitzva gives rise to his forfeiting its opportunity. Hashem's promise to Dovid merely meant that opportunity will be made available for Shlomo to succeed his father. Whether this would actually transpire depended on numerous factors. The greatest of them was Dovid Hamelech's commitment to this promise and his deliberate action towards its realization.

True, Hashem's plan called for Shlomo to reign but it required human involvement to bring it to fruition. When the appropriate moment arrived Dovid Hamelech was expected to do everything within his power to secure Shlomo's reign. Any delay of Dovid Hamelech could have caused him to forfeit Hashem's promise. Similarly, B'nayahu and the Sanhedrin were required to execute the king's order as soon as possible. Any delay in their process could give rise to unknown impediments and render their mission quite difficult to fulfill. B'nayahu, the head of Sanhedrin understood this well

and consequently expressed his sincere plea to Hashem. He asked that it should be Hashem's will that Dovid's loyal servants faithfully respond to their call thereby securing their efforts with success. (see Path of the Just ch. 7)

The Sages share with us a similar perspective about prayer and our false sense of security. Says Rabba bar Rav Shila, "One should daven to Hashem for a peaceful stay in this world up to the last bit of dirt thrown into his grave." (Mesichta Brachos 8a) The Sages are telling us that nothing is guaranteed in this world. One may enjoy a peaceful and tranquil life but things may drastically change during his last moments. In fact, even after one's life closes strife and quarrel can develop over his internment. One requires Hashem's assistance for virtually everything in life and afterwards and is not even guaranteed a peaceful burial. The Sages remind us that present predicaments are deceiving and should never be used to gauge the future. Our single answer is t'fila. After sincerely approaching Hashem we can at least hope that Hashem will respond and bring His intended plans to fruition.

This approach to Divine providence appears throughout this week's sedra. At the close of last week's sedra Hashem informed our Patriarch Avrohom that Yitzchok's ordained wife, Rivka was born. (see Rashi to Breishis 22:20) Avrohom waited until for her to mature and then engaged immediately in securing this marriage. He summoned his devoted student and trustworthy servant Eliezer to fulfill this invaluable mission. He proceeded and bound Eliezer with an oath to faithfully adhere to his master's command. He sternly warned him to go directly to Avrohom's family in pursuit of a proper match and reiterated that under no conditions will Yitzchok marry a Canaanite lady or leave the land of Israel. Although Avrohom knew that Rivka was pre-ordained to marry Yitzchok he went to great lengths to secure this.

Indeed, the Sages reveal that Eliezer considered his daughter as an eligible candidate but Avrohom rejected the notion. Yet, this could give rise to Eliezer's bias and inhibit him from faithfully fulfilling his mission. Consequently Avrohom did everything in his power to secure that Yitzchok marry his pre-ordained spouse. (see Rashi ibid 24:39) True, Heaven decreed this marriage but this did not guarantee that it would happen. Who knows what could stand in the way and interfere with Hashem's proposal?! Avrohom therefore demanded from his trustworthy servant a heavy oath in attempt to secure his faithful fulfillment of his mission.

We learn from this the importance of capitalizing on our mitzva opportunities. They may often represent special privileges Hashem is granting us. However, such privileges are prone to opposition and impediments and we must therefore do all we can to secure their realization. As we have seen, the working formula for this is to immediately engage ourselves into

action and pray to Hashem. After these we can hope that Hashem will respond favorably and bring His intended plans to fruition. © 2013 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

### RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

## Shabbat Shalom Weekly

**E**liezer arrives in Charan. Rivka gives him water to drink. The Torah states: "And she finished giving him to drink. And she said: 'Also for your camels I will draw water until they finish drinking' " (Genesis 24:19).

Why does the Torah specify that she will "draw water" rather than writing "I will give the camels to drink"?

The great Spanish Rabbi, the Abarbanel, tells us that Rivka was meticulously careful not to say anything that would be untrue. Therefore, she said she would draw water, as if to say, "I don't know for sure if they will drink or not, but I will draw water for them. If they want to, they can drink."

Rabbi Shmuel Walkin adds that we see here how careful we should be to keep away from saying anything untrue. He cites as an example Rabbi Refael of Bershid who was always very careful to refrain from saying anything that was untrue. One day he entered his home while it was raining outside. When asked if it was still raining, he replied, "When I was outside it was raining." He did not want to mislead in case it had stopped raining from the time he entered his home.

This may seem to be ridiculous or inconsequential. However, if a person is careful with keeping to the truth in such instances, he will definitely be careful in more important matters. On the other hand, if a person is careless with the truth, he can even be tempted to lie in major ways! *Based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2013 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com*

### RABBI CHAIM FLOM

## Short Vorts

**A** few months ago, Rabbi Yaacov Katz (a Rosh Chabura in the Mirrer Yeshiva) and I were among eight people who were needed to make a minyan for mourners whom we didn't know. As the other six left after the davening, they said perfunctorily "Hamakom Yinachem..." (the standard line of consoling a mourner). Rabbi Katz sat down and said to these strangers "tell me something about your mother..." We stayed there for about ten minutes listening.

"And it was after the death of Avraham that G-d blessed Yitzchok (Avraham's son)..." (Biraishis 25:11) The Gemara in Sota 14a learns that this was G-d's way of comforting a mourner, and we are supposed to emulate the ways of G-d.

That day, some of us did a mitzva of helping make a mourner's minyan, and others also really

fulfilled the mitzva of consoling mourners. (By the way, no one has the real secret of what to say to mourners, but certainly showing that you are concerned and interested goes a long way.) © 2007 Rabbi C. Flom & torah.org

### RABBI DOV KRAMER

## Taking a Closer Look

**“A**nd [Avraham] spoke to the Hittites, saying: 'I am a stranger and a dweller with you' (B'reishis 23:3-4). In order to explain how Avraham could claim to be both a "stranger" and a "dweller" if the former connotes someone who is not currently where he lives while the latter refers to someone who does live there, Rashi first suggests that he was referring to both his original status, as he was a "stranger" when he arrived in Canaan, and his current status, as he currently lived there. Rashi then paraphrases the approach of the Midrash (B'reishis Rabbah 58:6), that Avraham was giving them a choice: "if you want, I will be considered a stranger, and if not, I will be a dweller and take it by law, for G-d said to me, 'to your descendants I will give this land.'" The commentators ask how Rashi could suggest that Avraham would be able to take property based on the land belonging to him. After all, he had explained (13:7) the rift between Avraham's shepherds and Lot's shepherds to be based on whether or not the land already belonged to Avraham, with Avraham not allowing his shepherds to graze on private property because the land was not yet given to him. How could Avraham insist that the Hittites sell him property by threatening to take it based on it already being his, if the land didn't belong to him yet?

The most common answer given is that since the land was promised to Avraham and his descendants, and at the time of the disagreement between the shepherds, he did not yet have any, the land was not yet his. On the other hand, after Yitzchok (who was obviously his descendant) was born, the land became his; the land had therefore already been his for 37 years (Yitzchok's age when Sara died) when Avraham asked the Hittites to sell him a burial plot.

Other commentators ask several strong questions on this approach. For example, Nachalas Yaakov (23:4) points that the "descendants" mentioned in the promise referred to the generation that entered the land after the exodus from Egypt, not to Yitzchok; since the land never belonged to Avraham in his lifetime, he couldn't have insisted that a burial plot for Sara was already his. B'reishis Rabbah (41:5) says explicitly (paraphrasing G-d), "I said to [Avraham], 'to your descendants I have given it'; [i.e.] when the seven [Canaanite] nations are uprooted from within it." Until then, though, the land did not belong to Avraham; not when Lot's shepherds wanted to graze on it nor when Avraham wanted to bury Sara in it. Additionally,

Avraham kept his animals muzzled even after Yitzchok was born (see Rashi on 24:10), to the extent that everyone knew they were Avraham's animals because of their muzzles (indicating that he must have always kept them muzzled, even at home in Canaan). If the land became Avraham's after Yitzchok was born, why would he have to prevent his animals from grazing on land that he owned? B'er BaSadeh (13:7) adds that the Talmud (Sanhedrin 90) "proves" that the dead will be resurrected from the fact that the land was promised to our forefathers, yet they never actually owned it while they were alive (thereby necessitating their being resurrected in order for G-d to be able to fulfill His promise to them). If our forefather never owned the land, how could Avraham have said (to the Hittites) that he did, to the extent that they must give him land to bury Sara?

Although B'er BaSadeh references Nachalas Yaakov's discussion of the issue before providing his own answer, their approaches are quite similar. Without getting into the technical details, they both say that Avraham never had full rights to the land, so couldn't benefit from its produce (or grazing land) without paying for it, but his stake in the land, either because his descendents would eventually own it (Nachalas Yaakov) or because he did own it but it was "on loan" to the Canaanites until his descendents came out of Egypt and reclaimed it (B'er BaSadeh) gave him the right to bury his dead on land that was not useful agriculturally. (This was true before Yitzchok was born too; the shepherds were fighting over the ability to graze in the land, which Avraham did not have the rights to.) [This would explain why Avraham only asked for the cave, but never mentioned buying the field attached to it; Avraham knew he had no right to the field itself. Efrone may have insisted that the field be part of the sale precisely because giving/selling him only the cave meant tacitly accepting Avraham's true or eventual ownership of the land.]

Nevertheless, how could Avraham have "taken [the land] by law" just because G-d had told him that He had given it to him? Did Avraham plan to take Efrone to a Hittite court (or tribunal) and expect it to rule in his favor, that the land really belongs to him, not Efrone (and by extension that he owns all of Canaan)? Did he think he could take it by force, and was threatening to do so if Efrone didn't sell it to him? What did Avraham really mean when he said that if they won't sell it to him as a stranger he'll "take it by law"? Whose law?

Last year

(<http://rabbidmk.wordpress.com/2012/11/08/parashas-chayei-sara-5773/>) I quoted Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom, who referenced the law in the Ancient Near East that a foreigner was not allowed to buy land. Rabbi Etshalom suggested that Avraham had a plan to circumvent that law, by being officially "adopted" into a local family. Rabbi Moshe Shamah ("Recalling the Covenant") references the same law, but rather than suggesting an

"adoption-sale" to work around the law, writes that "exceptions were generally only possible with the broad consent of the townspeople or the leaders." Either way, Avraham had to convince the local Hittites to allow him to buy a plot of land despite the fact that he was not a native. Whether he had to get around the law by using a legal-loophole or the law provided for exceptions if the local population was willing to make one, Avraham had to speak to the entire local population (23:3) before approaching Efrone, and convince them that the law not to sell land to non-natives shouldn't apply to him. His opening words, "I am a stranger and a dweller with you," were therefore meant to address this issue.

It should be noted that the Midrash Rashi is based on does not use the words "I will take it by law," only "if you want, [I will be considered a] stranger, if not, [I am, or should be considered] the owner of the house, for so did G-d say to me: 'to your descendants I have given this land.'" [Another not-so-insignificant difference is that the verbiage Rashi quotes G-d as saying is in the future tense ("to your descendants I will give this land") as opposed to past tense ("I have given").] The suggestion I am about to make can fit into Rashi's wording as well as with the way the Midrash puts it.

Avraham was willing to buy the land from Efrone, as evidenced by the exorbitant price he paid for it. And if the locals were willing to sell it to him despite his not being from the area, he was fine with that. "If you are willing" to sell me the land despite my being a stranger, "then you can still consider me a stranger." But "if not," if an exception cannot be made, then I still have a way for the sale to go through, since I could/should really be considered a local (a "dweller"), since "G-d promised to give this land to my descendants." It wasn't a threat to "take it by force," either physically or through the courts, but an explanation as to why Avraham should be considered a local rather than a stranger, and therefore allowed, by Hittite law, to own land.

The locals responded by saying "you are a prince of G-d among us," which can be understood as not only an acceptance of G-d's promise as being relevant to them, but as an acceptance of Avraham as being "among them," i.e. a local and therefore allowed to own land there. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

